
Iraq: Card. Sako (Patriarch), "they want to plunge the country into chaos for partisan interests." Uncertainties over Al-Tayyeb's visit

"The attack on Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi was aimed at further destabilising the national situation after the elections, thereby stalling the new Parliament and the appointment of the highest State dignitaries, from the President of the Republic to the Prime Minister." Cardinal **Louis Raphael Sako**, Chaldean Patriarch of Baghdad, comments on the assassination attempt against Prime Minister al-Khadimi, who emerged unscathed, on the night of November 6. The outcome of the October 10 vote was publicly challenged by pro-Iranian Shiite movements, such as the Conquest (Fatah) Alliance, the political arm of Hashed Al Shaabi paramilitary network, defeated at the polls. Violent demonstrations near the 'Green Zone' of the Iraqi capital claimed one dead and several injured. "It hurts to see people protesting so violently," Mar Sako told SIR. We are worried about the political vacuum that is starting to unfold." **Pope Francis**. Pope Francis sent a message of solidarity to the Iraqi Prime Minister on November 9 signed by Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin. In the telegram, the Holy Father conveys his "prayerful closeness" and condemns "this vile act of terrorism." "His Holiness", the text reads, "once again expresses his confidence that, with the blessing of the Most High God, the people of Iraq will be confirmed in wisdom and strength in pursuing the path of peace through dialogue and fraternal solidarity." These words, says Card. Sako, "instil courage and strength, essential to advance the reforms urgently needed in the country. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi has embarked on this task, and now they want to stop him with violent means." The Chaldean Patriarch insisted: "The goal is to cause turmoil and chaos. The perpetrators of the attack are not seeking a stable and strong Iraq, but a country plunged into chaos in order to continue serving their own sectarian and partisan interests." Regional stakeholders' interests in Iraq are many and varied. In this respect, the Patriarch reiterates a notion he has voiced on several occasions before:

"A strong and safer Iraq could be conducive to regional stability, but clearly some players are working against it."

Official visit uncertain. The tensions in the country could also impact on the visit of the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb to Iraq - widely believed to be confirmed - and on his meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a veritable 'dialogue workshop' between Sunni and Shia Islam leaders in the light of the Abu Dhabi Document, and in the wake of the Pope's visit to Iraq last March. "I doubt that whoever carried out the assassination attempt on the Prime Minister was also targeting this meeting," Mar Sako said. "The visit has not yet been officially announced, not until now, there is no programme or date. Late November was mentioned as a possible date, but given the current situation it is very unlikely. I believe that this visit will happen only when the situation in Iraq will be safer and marked by greater stability, probably after the formation of a new government" which, the Patriarch fears, might leave "no room for Christian representatives." **Young Iraqis.** In contrast, the Chaldean Patriarch has high hopes for the country's youth:

"I am certain that the future of Iraq will be brighter, and Iraq's future is made up of its young people".

The upcoming meeting of Chaldean youths, to be held in the Iraqi capital on 18-20 November with the theme "You are a living Church", takes on a special meaning. "We are expecting no less than 400 young people from Baghdad and other Iraqi Chaldean dioceses", the Patriarch said. He continued: "I have invited the Prime Minister to deliver a speech, but after the attack we are not sure if it will happen." The event coincides with the eve of World Youth Day, which this year for the first time will

be celebrated on the Solemnity of Christ the King, after the traditional date of Palm Sunday was changed. "It will be a time of meditation, faith and celebration to boost the morale of young people. We need them for the new Iraq".

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